

The Dancing Mania of Modern Times

But it is not the Modern Dancers who are Mad

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

A FEW centuries ago Europe was visited by what was known as the dancing mania of the middle ages. This was a sort of religious revival which took the form of fits of dancing that in many cases lasted till the dancer was utterly exhausted; and in order to get some of the victims out of their giddy habits it became necessary to invent a sort of dance piece known as the "tarantelle," which in many cases because of its very unusual character, succeeded in charming the maniacs back to the ordinary motions of other people.

But that was a long while ago; and Europe has never had another such a visitation in the name of religion. Now art comes along—which it began to do a good many years ago—and we have an outbreak of dancing which has become so general all over Europe, in England, and at last in America and Canada, that the civilised world may fairly be said to have gotten another dancing mania; the great difference being that the most of the dancing is done by experts who perform on the stage for the amusement of those who have money to spend for that sort of thing. In which respect the modern dancing mania has come to resemble certain forms of drama and baseball and other diversions.

But nobody wants to charm the *premiere danseuse* out of her dancing. The more she does it—and the more madly and beautifully—the merrier. Canada got its first glimpse of classic dancing in Isadora Duncan last year, and glimpses of other less classic but more passionate *danseuses* when Genee came and the tribes of the Salomes. For it is a good while since we learned that "Little Egypt" was a discard from the pack. Last week the Russian ballet came and we have another view.

The sober Anglo-Saxon race has lost its head to the *danseuses*. Never was such a whirligig of the "poetry of motion" as set London by the ears last season. At the Alhambra and the Coliseum the fantastic-toers from Paris and Russia—and one from Canada—have turned critical attention away from the glories of serious drama or drama of almost any kind.

The Psychological Side.

So is it becoming in New York; beginning to be so in Canada. Why? Musical comedy and comic opera, and even high-class vaudeville have been sidetracked for this the most sensuous, ultra-aesthetic—well, whatever you can't get in ordinary drama and opera. The *danseuse* does the trick. With the aid of gorgeous music and classic clothing—such as there is—she takes you out of the merely intellectual; away from the demigod stupidities of Wagnerian plots and the nerve-tiring polyphonics of modern music; into the realm where you not only hear, but see music; where physical life becomes as nearly as possible a spirituelle conception—so that you are no longer concerned as to where the outer vestments leave off and the inward personality begins. It's a good deal like seeing coloured ghosts by moonlight—with the additional advantage of having fairy music and elfish stage effects to merge the imagination and the senses and the reason in one glorious dream of harmony and rhythm and motion. However, I don't know that the exact or the inexact psychology of the thing interests many people who know they like very well to see ballet or classic dancing even when the same thing in the drawing-room would be counted "risque" and "outré," and all manner of French things that by English names would be tabooed in polite conversation.

Besides there's a subtle sort of satisfaction in talking over the thing afterwards; just to see if you can't get uncle or grandma looking uncomfortable. On the whole there's no harm done. So long as the *danseuse* has put you nearer to the incredible beauties of nature it's better than faking up a yawny interest in Wagner when you pretend you are enthusiastic and can't begin to tell why; better than going to Ibsen or problem plays of any sort; quite as wholesome as a good picture gallery, and the next best thing to fields and birds if you don't happen to have the birds and fields handy and can't half appreciate them when you have.

But of course the value of stage dancing, like that of any other art, depends largely on how well it is done. Once you have settled that, you know good from bad art in the dance you have learned something worth while; for dancing is one of the oldest of the arts, and will probably endure as long as rhythm is a gift of the human race.

Pavlowa and Mikail Mordkin came heading a troupe of balletists accompanied by an alleged sec-

tion of the Metropolitan Opera House orchestra from New York. In Toronto there were packed houses and tiptoe expectation; also disappointment; or else misapprehension. Russian ballet is a new thing in Canada, and to most of us quite too baffling to comprehend in a single night. So far as could be observed, most of it was a mixture of pantomime, revel and more or less serious, even tragic drama, taking the form of legend; all set to more or less excellent music. The actual dance occupied only part of the performance. The acting was probably good.

But the Russian *ballerina* and her fellow-artist came to Canada under bad conditions. To begin with, the orchestra was a scratch; played out of tune and without spirit; an aggregation of average fourth-raters. The queen of *ballerinas* could not be expected to do herself credit to such music, even with the best of accessories and the best of programme selection. But the staging was also bad;



Napierkowska, one of the great Russian danseuses appearing as a Bedouin maid in an Arab ballet in Paris.



The light fantastic Kysht, another Russian, as she danced in the Alhambra in London. She is a close friend of Pavlowa.

much worse than in a third-class theatre. The stage carpentering was atrocious; at least twenty minutes between acts, and some of the "props" came down almost on top of the actors. The worst feature of all was the poor management, which thought it necessary to send along a dozen mediocrities to clog the performance. Quite likely they imagined that dance criticism was at a low ebb in America and that the more they could put on the stage the merrier. But if Pavlowa and Mordkin could have given the entire evening without bothering about the indifferent ballet it would have been a performance worth while.

Ancient and Modern.

Of course ballet is one thing and dancing another. The ballet is modern. The dancing of Isadora Duncan and Maud Allan is classic—much of it Grecian. There is all the difference in the world. The ancient is not less sensuous, but far more subdued; more interpretative of the music and less colourful; depends less upon stage accessories when everything is simplified; less upon costumes when there is a minimum of acting and little or no plot and but little pantomime. Classic dancing may be appreciated on any stage big enough. Ballet dancing demands all the machinery and atmosphere of a first-class theatre. The Russian ballet dancers begin to learn the tricks of the art when children. They are sent to the government school for dancing; for the ballet in Russia is a state affair, with its own definite traditions and stage setting and a wide range of repertoire.

It would be unfair to the wraith of the pirouette and the diaphonous misty robes to say that she is anything less than an absolute mistress of her art. She set London agog as not even any of the other famous Russian dancers, nor Isadora Duncan, nor Maud Allan, nor Leonora and Britta from Paris have done. But in London she had the best of everything; in Canada just about the worst—except in the matter of audience.

Some day we may be able to see Russian ballet under ideal conditions. That will be when the management who send out the ballet discover that in America we are not so crude as to demand a whole stageful of half-expert people when two would be plenty—or even one, if as good as Pavlowa or Mordkin.

Everybody's Thanksgiving

DURING recent years, the West of Canada seemed to have more reason for thanksgiving than the East, because it was in that portion of the country that development was most rapid. This year it is not the case, since the development of 1910 has been unusually uniform. Canada's Thanksgiving will thus be equal in every section—equally hearty and equally enthusiastic.

For example, it is now evident that the British and European immigration is benefiting East as well as West. There have been charges that the Immigration Department was ignoring Eastern Canada, and devoting all its attention to the West. The charges were largely true, because it was absolutely necessary that the cheap-land section of Canada should be used as the magnet. Besides, the older provinces were better able to look after themselves. Yet of the total European immigration of 94,800 people who came in during the twelve months ending March last, sixty per cent. went to the older provinces. This is a fair distribution, and the older provinces should certainly have no further ground of complaint on this score. The latest published figures on this point are for April and May, and show that during those two months, fifty per cent. of the European immigration went to Ontario and Quebec, 20,755 to Ontario and 9,470 to Quebec.

Of course the bulk of the United States immigration goes to the West. That is natural, and the East has no complaint on that score. Taking the whole immigration into Canada, forty per cent. goes to the East and sixty per cent. to the West. Indeed, it may surprise some people in the East who have not got close to the facts to discover that the East gets such a large proportion. If Ontario is not satisfied, it is a rich province, and able to establish stronger agencies in Great Britain than it has hitherto had. Indeed it is a cause for wonder that Ontario spends so little on securing additions to its agricultural population. In this fault, it has the excellent company of the Maritime Provinces.

Canada has made wonderful progress during 1910, and the outlook is most encouraging. While giving thanks for this prosperity, neither the Dominion as a whole, nor any province in particular, can afford to relax its efforts. On the contrary, every citizen should resolve that the present is but the beginning.